

Poverty and Unemployment as Contributors to Nigeria's Dependency from Independence to Date

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Abstract

Unemployment has greatly affected the citizenry and the economic development of Nigeria from a large spectrum of socio-economic outlook. In Nigeria, the rate of unemployment and poverty has grown large to the extent that it is very difficult to address by mere campaign or the use of words of mouth. It requires the combination of efforts from both individuals and the government of the country in particular and the world in general for the formulation of an eternal solution to be achieved. It is obvious that unemployment is one of the major causes of poverty which metamorphoses into underdevelopment or dependency of the country upon the advanced nations. This study, by making use of a content analysis method, aims at examining the relationship between unemployment and poverty in Nigeria and how they contribute in deepening Nigeria's dependency from independence to date. Theory of economic nationalism is employed to illustrate how the citizens of developing countries like Nigeria are made unemployed and poor, which translates into their dependency upon the advanced nations in the world. The finding of the research shows that unemployment is one of the factors that contribute immensely to the increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria which results in intensifying the level of the country's dependency. It is, therefore, recommended among others that control of population growth in Nigeria is very vital and is not necessary to make it possible for the country to create employment opportunities for its citizenry by making use of its available resources.

Keywords: Poverty, Unemployment, Dependency, Economic Nationalism, Nigeria.

Introduction

Being considered a global issue, poverty is required to be given much attention by all states and international institutions across the globe. This is very vital as Egunjobi (2014) argues that many people in the world have been affected by poverty. Therefore, reducing the rate of poverty among people and enhancing the quality of life through the establishment of a positive standard of living is necessary. This can be achieved by effecting production and distribution of consumer goods and services as well as creation of employment (Egunjobi, 2014). Unemployment and poverty remain the major challenges of man across the globe both in less advanced countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia, and advanced countries of Western Europe and North America. Nonetheless, it is much more noticeable in the less advanced countries, particularly Africa where Nigeria is situated (Usman, 2015). Despite being seen as a promising nation far ahead of countries such as India, Malaysia and Singapore at

independence, Nigeria is still struggling at the bottom rung of the ladder of development by having its economy dependent upon that of the advanced nations of the Western Europe and Northern America resulting in a situation where more than half of its citizens are unable to have both ends meet while these countries have achieved considerable progress in most indices of growth (Tom, 2014). Even in comparison to other nations in Africa and other parts of the third world, the situation of Nigeria is worse. This is true as its per capita income in 1990, which was \$240 was clearly below the average of over \$500 for sub-Saharan Africa, when per capita income was used as a measure of poverty. It was only South Africa that was able to record the highest GNP per capita of \$ 2,290 in 1988 when the world average was \$3, 470 (Egunjobi, 2014). This according to Dan Asabe (2019) makes the problem of poverty and unemployment increased and is felt by the majority of the citizenry, which results the country (despite its natural wealth in terms of human and material resources) poor, less developed and dependent upon foreign aids and loan from the industrially advanced nations of the Western Europe and Northern America, as well as their instruments of exploitations – international financial institutions.

Nigeria's economy began to develop signs of depression at the beginning of 1979; high levels of inflation and unemployment became the feature of the economy from 1980 to 1990. This was the result of the tactical methods of the IMF and World Bank to intellectually and financially bring down the economies of third world countries (Nigeria inclusive) by making them embrace the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in an effort to ensure independent economy. As a result of the implementation of SAP, Nigeria's currency was devalued, public expenditure on vital social services was drastically reduced, public enterprises were privatized and the entire economy was planned to be deregulated. As a result of this, the country became more dependent upon the developed countries that are the financers of these Bretton Woods Institutions. The social consequence of these adjustment programs is the massive and increasing rate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria today (Tom, 2014). The programmes gave birth to the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs. Unemployment grew; the population's real incomes went down – meant a low standard of living; local industries were out of operation and skilled workers continued to abandon the economy for a more favorable environment (Aiyedogbon & Chwafasa, n.d). The level of unemployment, which is one of the major causes of poverty in Nigeria, has grown so large that it even seems impossible to be addressed by mere campaigning or by using the words of mouth alone. It requires the combination of efforts from both individuals and the government of the country in order to turn the direction of its economy into becoming more independent (Nwankwo & Ifejiolor, 2014).

Several policies have been formulated with the aim of reducing the rate of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria that would subsequently help in boosting the country's economy and becoming more economically independent in the world; however, these policies have not achieved much of the desired results as the situation has reached an extent where the country is experiencing budget deficit and thus need foreign loan to balance it (Akinbobola & Saibu, 2004). According to Egunjobi (2014), high rate of unemployment and underemployment, low

wages, and poor working condition are the features of Nigerian labour market which generate other problems including the increase in rate of crime, threat to peace and stability among people, low level of investment, large number of people migrating to urban areas, slowing the progress of economic development, as well as lower standard of living as a result of low income levels, high rate of poverty and inequality gaps and inflation that subsequently make it necessary for the country to seek help from outside that contributes in deepening its dependency upon the helper countries – advanced countries of Europe and Northern America. Therefore, this study is aimed at examining the relationship between unemployment and poverty in Nigeria and how they contribute in deepening Nigeria's dependency on the developed nations from independence to date.

Methodology

Due to the historical nature of the study, library research method is adopted. This means that the study depends upon secondary qualitative data only. This type of data normally takes the form of text, picture or charts that are collected from various sources including published and unpublished documents such as journal articles, newspapers and other academic works. These are found in libraries and newspapers achieved from the internet. Thus, the data was secondhand to the researchers, as they did not generate it directly from its source rather, from what others had already generated for their studies. The gathered data were analyzed using the content analysis method which is highly interpretive as it involves the reading of texts from various forms of documents to determine the presence, relationship and meanings of concepts or measure the opinions and views of some experts, scholars and other prominent persons via what is documented and come up with desired answer to a set objective. Having no constraint in accessibility to the data, the study's scope is from independence to date.

Conceptual Clarifications

Poverty

The concept of poverty includes deprivation of different dimensions. It is the failure of people to meet economic, social and other standards of living. Perceptions of the concept of poverty are numerous relative to people, country, context, and the distributions of national wealth to mention a few (Egwuatu, 2002). Poverty is one of the concepts that cannot clearly and concisely be defined – thus, it is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. Most of the time, material-based indicators and income/consumption form attractive points of reference for defining it. According to Abubakar (2002), poverty is a shortage and ruined human material situations that block the best possible realization of basic needs such as food, health, education, shelter and clothing. Based on this definition, it is obvious that poverty is associated with people who lack the necessities of life. To Oloyede (2014), poverty is in existence where and when the amount of resources available to a person is less compared to the amount required by that person. The nature of man, therefore, makes the above definition somewhat difficult to be accepted as there is no clear measurement of the minimal resources required by a person before he can be said to be free of poverty.

Most of the times in defining poverty a distinction is made between absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is about the insufficiency in physical requirements of a person or household for survival. It is so severe to the extent that those affected are not in any way in a position to lead a life worthy of human dignity. Relative poverty, on the other hand, refers to a person or household whose provision of goods required for existence is less compared to other persons or households with similar income level or social standing (Egunjobi, 2014). This clearly means that relative poverty exists when and where the person in consideration is poor in relation to others. Also, Abubakar (2002) asserts that absolute poverty is inadequate of physical minimum requirements for a person or household to survive. Relative poverty, in contrast, refers to a person or household whose provision of goods and services is less than that of other persons. Abubakar further argues that the features of poverty include, but not limited to insufficient food supply, lack of potable water, poor nutrition, unfit housing, high rate of infant mortality, low life expectancy, low educational opportunity, lack of assets that are productive, inadequacy of economic infrastructure, insecurity, as well as inability to participate in decision-making process.

Conceptually, in Odeh and Okoye (2014) three central views are identified regarding the meaning of poverty. The first view identifies poverty as a severe deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. That is deprivation of material, which can be calculated in monetary terms. The second perspective views poverty as the failure of realizing basic capabilities including being adequately nourished, living a healthy life, acquisition of skills to participate in economic and social life, permission to take part in the activities of community, and the like. The third conceptualization of poverty was first considered in the 1990s and has come up with a fundamentally different approach in understanding the concept of poverty. The heart of this view of poverty is that poverty has to be defined by the poor themselves or by the communities that are occupied by the poor people. This subjective view of poverty posits that poverty includes both physical and psychological dimensions.

Unemployment

The concept of unemployment to the nonprofessional can be said to be a situation when people stay without jobs or simply a state of joblessness. However, professionally different scholars view the concept differently. To Egwu and Chinwe (2016) unemployment is a state when people who are willing and able to work at the popular wage rate are unable to find jobs. This means that the people who are regarded as unemployed must be interested in having jobs and able to work but without the jobs. Thus, people who are not actively seeking to be employed are not counted as unemployed in any particular societal labour force. According to Udu and Agu (2005) cited in Kayode, Arome and Anyio (2014), unemployment is a condition whereby persons willing and able to work are unable to find suitable paid jobs. As defined by the International Labor Organization (2007) in Kayode, Arome and Anyio (2014), unemployed people are those who are not currently working but are willing and able to work for payment, currently available to work and have actively searched for work.

Actually, the concept of unemployment, according to Long (1958), provides less of a boundary than a battleground on which economic and social philosophies are still fighting. This can clearly be seen in the literature on the subject which falls into three main categories. According to him, the first can barely be seen to have defined unemployment at all for the writings ranged from entailing that the unemployed persons tend to be unemployable (due to their demand of higher wages than they are worth) to letting the idle person agree on his own status, hardly stipulating that a person must first have been a gainful worker, that is, a member of the labor force, in order to be classified as unemployed. The second group, which is mainly theoretical, has tended to characterize the unemployed as people willing and able to work but not working. The writers, according to Long, have not only differed from one another in their treatment of such awkward problems, the self-employed, family workers, persons who are temporarily sick or without jobs, people on part-time job and inexperienced job seekers, but also in their interpretation of what willingness and ability to work is all about.

The third, structured group, defines the unemployed persons as those who labeled themselves as those who are willing and able to work. But the writings vary according to the test applied by the writers themselves. There are those who use a criterion that the fact that the persons are usually working or would be if jobs are available. Still others ask if the persons are seeking work. But the consensus, as noted, and the survey usually accepts the respondent's statement that the idle persons are willing and able to work and are seeking jobs, irrespective of the economic situations that might affect their willingness and ability (Long, 1958). Generally, unemployment can be regarded as a situation of worklessness which is experienced by people who see themselves in the labour force and are seen by others as being capable to work and have the spirit of working in them.

Dependency

Dependency, as indicated by Alaye (2019) relates to a situation or condition under which the economy of a particular country is conditioned by the expansion and development of another country to which the former is subjected. Thus, the inter-dependence relations between two or more economies in world trade terms takes the form of dependence in which the countries – the industrialized nations such as Britain, USA, France and Germany – are in the position of expanding and being self-sustaining. While the other countries – the dependent countries such as Nigeria – can achieve this only as a reflection of expansion that can either have a positive or negative effect on their immediate development. To Emeh (2013), dependency is an explanation of the economic development of a country in terms of influences that are external such as political, cultural and economic on national development policies. He stresses the historical dimension of the relationships of dependency by indicating that historical situation that shapes a certain structure of the world economy in the sense that it favors some countries at the expense of others and restricts the development possibilities of the subordinate economies. Three common characteristics are deductible from this definition; one, that dependency characterizes the international system as it involves two or more countries that are described as center/periphery, dominant/dependent, or metropolitan/satellite. Two, external forces such as

international commodity markets, multinational corporations, and foreign assistance are of singular importance to the economic activities within the satellite countries. Three, that the relationships between center and periphery countries are dynamic due to the fact that the interactions between the countries tend to both reinforce and intensify the unequal patterns.

Dependency as a concept becomes externally tricky in an increasingly integrated world economy. According to Offiong (1980), it refers to the situation that the history of colonial imperialism has left and that modern imperialism creates in underdeveloped countries. This definition indicates dependency has to do with the condition in which the third world countries find themselves because of their encounter with the advanced countries through which their economy was designed to be dependent upon that of their colonialists. According to Johnson (1972), dependency is imperialism seen from the perspective of underdevelopment. Dependency from this perspective is therefore not an external factor but as a conditioning situation in which the specific histories of development and underdevelopment transpired in various societies. To Dos Santos cited in Offiong (1970), dependency refers to a situation in which a certain group of countries have their economy conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. This means that dependency is when the economies of countries are integrated to the degree that the advancement and otherwise of them are dependent upon the others.

Unemployment and Poverty Linkages in Nigeria

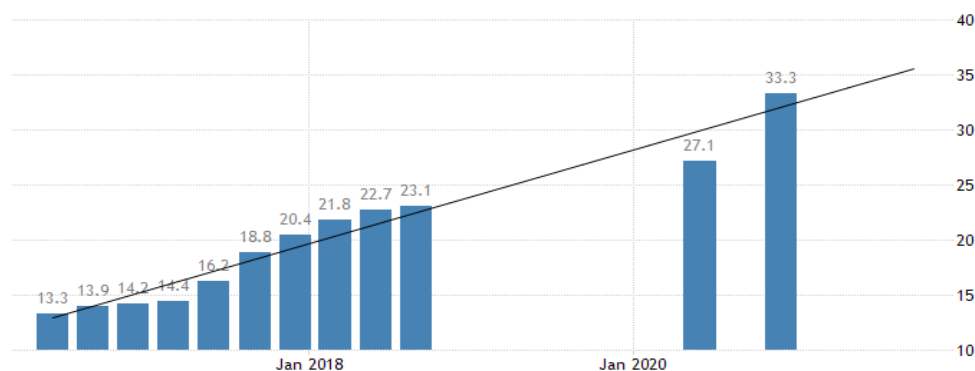
Despite the fact that poverty is a global problem, in the case of Nigeria it can be traced to the excessive mismanagement of the Nigerian economy by succeeding governments both military and civilian who habitually change the economic policies they found in place which have impacted harmfully on the population and have worsened income distribution (Egunjobi, 2014). Egunjobi (2014) continued that incidence of increasing rate of unemployment in Nigeria has recently been deep and widespread, cutting across all sides of age groups, educational strata and geographical entities. One strange characteristic of the unemployment problem in Nigeria is that it was more endemic in the early 1980s than any other period. Unemployment has been classified as one of the serious obstacles of social progress. Apart from representing a huge waste of a country's manpower resources, it generates welfare loss in terms of lower income and well-being.

Unemployment in Nigeria has affected the citizenry from a broad variety of socio-economic perspectives. This is very clear as it hinders Nigeria's progress in several ways (Nwankwo & Ifejiofor, 2014). Apart from the economic waste it has brought to the nation and constituted political unrest for the country, it increases the rate of poverty. Nwankwo and Ifejiofor (2014) stressed further that, the condition of unemployment in Nigeria is alarming and even more disheartening that the country's economic situation cannot suck up an optimal proportion of its labour force. This situation has contributed to the increase in the rate of poverty, crimes and other social problems experienced in our society recently. According to Holmes, McCord and Zanket (2013), there are strong observed evidences that unemployment generally decreases

incomes, which results in increasing level of poverty in low-income countries at both micro and macro levels, and a noteworthy body of research decomposes the effect of various factors on poverty, illustrating the critical role of unemployment as a major cause of poverty in both middle and low-income countries like Nigeria. Thus, it is obvious that unemployment is a key mechanism for increasing the level of poverty both directly and indirectly.

According to Usman (2015), the major factor contributing to poverty in Nigeria is unemployment. When people are unemployed, their source of livelihood reduces over time. The cost of living becomes high while the standard of living goes down. It can clearly be seen that the number of people who lack the opportunity of being employed in Nigeria is high. To Usman, the situation or condition of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria can be suitably described using the epitaph of Onimode's 'paradox of wealth and mass poverty'. Nothing explains the inconsistency of poverty in the midst of plenty in Nigeria than Onimode's writing on Africa (Usman, 2015). Furthermore, Idoko (2013) asserted that there is a direct relationship between the stock of human capital and the level of development. Thus, job creation is a way of strengthening the personnel and therefore a means of achieving sustainable development. It is also argued that it is not merely access to employment in itself that determines poverty reduction on either a micro or macro level but the quality of the employment in terms of the type of job, the sector in which it is located, duration, wage levels and terms of employment, etcetera. In addition, the scale of employment, its spatial distribution, and its allocation across the income distribution that are the significant factors in determining the extent to which employment contributes to poverty reduction and the other way round is a matter of consideration (Okerere & Ekpe, 2002).

Unemployment Trend in Nigeria



Source: *Trading Economic (2021)*

The above diagram shows that the rate of unemployment in Nigeria has been moving upwardly. From the diagram, it is made clear that prior to 2018 there was a time when the percentage of unemployed persons was only 13.3. It increased from 13.9% to 20.4% in January 2018. From there, it moved upward to the region of around 27% in January 2020 and was around 33.3% in

the last quarter of 2020. What this means is that, despite the fact that all successive governments in the country come up with one or more poverty alleviation and job creation programmes in order to reduce the level of unemployment, yet the percentage of the unemployed is still on increase. As shown in the diagram above, there was no single period when the country witnessed a decrease in the percentage of the unemployed citizens, which can be said to be among the major causes of poverty among the citizenry as well as the subsequent underdevelopment and dependency of the country at international level.

Poverty and Unemployment leading to Nigeria's Dependency upon the Advanced Nations

Before the arrival of colonial masters in the third world countries, particularly Africa where Nigeria is a member state, societies lived in clans and empires. For instance, in the northern part of Nigeria, there existed the caliphate, in the West there were in existence various empires and communities, and the East was characterized by having egalitarian communities. Therefore, before the introduction of colonialism, the inhabitants of the territory now called Nigeria were not poor and idle as they engaged themselves in different kinds of occupations such as fishing, animal husbandry, hunting and gathering, and agriculture together with all of its various combinations of acquiring food and as source of income. These occupations, as well as many others, engaged in by the people made them self-reliant upon themselves without seeking assistance from other communities (Amzat & Olutayo, 2009). According to Oluwajuyemi (2018), the British introduced Nigerian goods to the European markets and the discovery of oil made Nigeria's foray into the global economy. This incorporation by the colonial masters into the global economy monetized and disarticulated the country's economy and made it to be part of the global capitalist economy at a subjugated position. Okeke (2015) opines that the country's economy was designed to be producing mainly primary commodities to feed the industries in the colonial masters' home countries while their countries were designed to be producing finished goods that are marketable in both the colony and the colonial master's states.

The unfavorable terms of trade and payment system to the third world countries and Nigeria in particular give birth to a situation where the countries produce more goods but end up with very small amounts to pursue developmental projects that would generate employment opportunities and improve the living condition of their citizenry. That is why Akpobasah (2004) describes Nigeria as a country that is poor amidst plenty. Despite its large oil, gas and solid minerals deposits coupled with a large number of educated and skilled work forces, about 62.6% of its total population lives below the poverty line (Onah & Olise, 2019) and the rate at which jobs are created is far less than the rate at which the population grows (Akpobasah, 2004). The raw materials produced and exported to the advanced countries are bought at a very cheap rate while the finished goods imported are at a very exorbitant price which makes the country, despite its abundant natural resources, poor and majority of its citizenry are unable to make both ends meet for they have no source of income.

As Nigeria experiences an unfavorable balance of payment that leads to its inability to internally generate development for the benefits of its citizenry, many of their teeming youth become idle –jobless and poor which makes it difficult if not impossible for it to satisfy their necessities of life. This, according to Usman (2015), results in the youth engaging themselves in all forms of social vices such as banditry, thievery, and arm robbery to mention but a few. In an effort to curtail the problem, governments resort to seeking foreign aid and loans from the international donors and financiers that are either the advanced capitalist and socialist states or their institutions. In spite of the fact that foreign aid and loans help developing countries such as Nigeria to improve their economic growth, many studies conducted on the area have arrived at a conclusion that they do more harm than good to the Nigerian economy. Murshed and Khanaum (2013) posit that it is very difficult, if not impossible to have any of such foreign aid or loan that is without any string attached to it. Sometimes, it is attached to a particular reform or liberal policy or project of the donor nation. This kind of reform or project is in most cases designed to promote economic well-being and influence of the donor nation at the expense of the recipient country. The fact is that, sometimes foreign aid is used in promoting imperialism in countries like Nigeria where the economy of the recipient country is tied to that of the giver in the sense that all developmental policies to be undertaken by the recipient country must match the interest of the donor country which increases their dependency. All these mechanisms are meant to serve a single purpose which is increasing dependency by teaching Western values and culture to the third world so as to ensure their dominance upon the developing countries (Okeke, 2015).

Moreover, Okeke (2015) explains that in most cases, foreign aid is tied to liberal policies such as privatization, deregulation and globalization under which the less developed countries are compelled to open up their economies with promises of rapid economic benefits. Regrettably, such policies usually end up compounding the problems of the Third world rather than solving them. The truth is that the more they opened up their economies, the more their markets were full of foreign goods that seem to be cheaper and qualitative. Consequently, the local industries are pushed out of operation which results in a condition of high rate of redundancy on one hand, and on the other hand compelled the country to import such goods for the satisfaction of its citizens needs from the advanced industrialized countries which further tightens their economies together at a dominant-dependent nature.

Economic Nationalism: A Theoretical Elucidation

This paper adopts economic nationalism as its theoretical framework, considering the fact that the theory is capable of explaining why third world countries are underdeveloped and the majority of their citizens are unemployed and hit hard by poverty. The founder and father of the theory was a onetime president of Indian National Congress (INC), Romesh Chunder Dutt. Other proponents of the theory include Alexander Hamilton and Friedrich List. The theory is concerned with the international division of labor created by capitalism. It sees the division of labour as unfair creating categories of rich and poor nations. According to Heilperin

(1960), economic nationalism developed theoretically as criticism of economic liberalism. This theory is based on three basic assumptions:

- i. States in the international system compete economically as opposed to economic liberalism view that only companies compete.
- ii. That free trade brings benefits to only the wealthiest or most advanced nations.
- iii. For the less advanced nations to be developed, there is a need for them to look for an alternative way of getting rich – other than the free trade.

This theory was developed as a response to the theory of economic liberalism that advocates for unrestricted international trade, as that would improve the economies of the less developed countries. According to this theory, the prevalent high-level poverty and unemployment in developing countries, particularly Africa, has its origin to the opening up of their borders and allowing goods and services from the industrialized countries of Western Europe and Northern America to flow into their local markets hitch free. The assumption of the theorists is that whenever the less developed countries such as Nigeria open up their borders by allowing foreign goods and services, the advanced countries would grasp the opportunity and fill their markets with goods that have competitive advantage over the locally produced as they make use of more sophisticated machines in producing them. This, according to Babawale (2007), results in the shutting down of the local industries as a result of low patronage from the citizens. The implication of which is that the number of unemployed automatically increase leading to the increased rate of poverty among the citizens. As this situation persists, the country will have no option other than to be using the money meant for developmental projects into exportation of such goods for the satisfaction of its citizenry. To Babawale, this results in making the country's economy unintentionally tied to that of the industrialized countries at a subjugated position and subsequently deepen their dependency.

Conclusion

The challenges of fighting the rising rate of poverty and unemployment level in Nigeria are the major tasks of policy-makers and economic experts alike, as the consequences of growing unemployment rate and poverty level are so damning that no economy can afford to despise it. Such implications are obvious in the Nigerian economy as it is clear that despite all her human and material resources, she is in a pool of debt and is still seeking for more foreign loans and aid from developed countries and their agencies such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and London and Paris Club of Creditor. And it is obvious that one of the greatest challenges facing the economy of Nigeria now is the formulation of effective policy measures that reduce unemployment and poverty which contributes in making the economy more dependent upon that of the advanced countries. Thus, the steady effort of the government towards reducing the rate of unemployment and the measures of alleviating the level of poverty in Nigeria determine its economic independence in the international system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

- i. Both Federal and States Governments should come up with appropriate means of controlling the population growth such as family planning, sex education, discouraging early marriage, encouragement of monogamy, public enlightenment, and legalization of abortion as it is a necessary measure to be taken before the government can provide job opportunities to all or at least most of the citizenry.
- ii. Federal, State and Local Governments in the country should support agriculture by giving out soft loans to farmers and ensure that the loans are used for that purpose. This is because it is the only sector in the country that can provide both formal and informal employment opportunities to more than half of the citizens.
- iii. Judicial arm of government should be allowed to exercise its constitutional power by executing all those who are found guilty of corruption. This will make it possible for the recouped funds to be used in many developmental projects that would generate employment opportunities.
- iv. It is also necessary for governments at both State and Federal levels to redesign the educational system through policies that will encourage or accommodate training or teaching vocational acquisition in high institutions.

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